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REPRESENTING THE PAST THROUGH THE MAGIC OF MINIATURES

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REPRESENTING THE PAST THROUGH THE MAGIC OF MINIATURES

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Andrei Mențeanu is a visual artist, film set designer and historical model maker with over 20 years of experience in the film and miniature film industry. Since 2020, Andrei has been a PhD student in Visual Arts at the National University of Art Bucharest. After graduating from the National University of Art Bucharest in 2000 with a specialization in Film and Theatre Set Design, Andrei started his professional career in theatre, cinema and historical reconstruction by making film miniatures. Over the years he has developed the concept of dioramas as a special effect in cinema and has been working since 2007 on numerous historical reconstructions made with the help of models. Andrei is currently working at the National University of Art in Bucharest on a historical reconstruction of the Second World War period to demonstrate the cultural and educational importance that the three-dimensional world of miniatures can convey to the public.

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Keywords

miniatures
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The visual magic of the miniature world allows the depiction of the past using a combination of advanced contemporary, as well as classical technologies. For the viewer to be transported back in time, the miniature must be a hyper-realistic representation that acts on the viewer's memory and imagination.

A miniature, appreciable in size, in which the scenes turn out to be drawn from the reality of the past, constitutes an extremely effective method of actualizing a tragic episode of history. And since miniatures can transform reality into art, they are, simultaneously, artistic compositions.

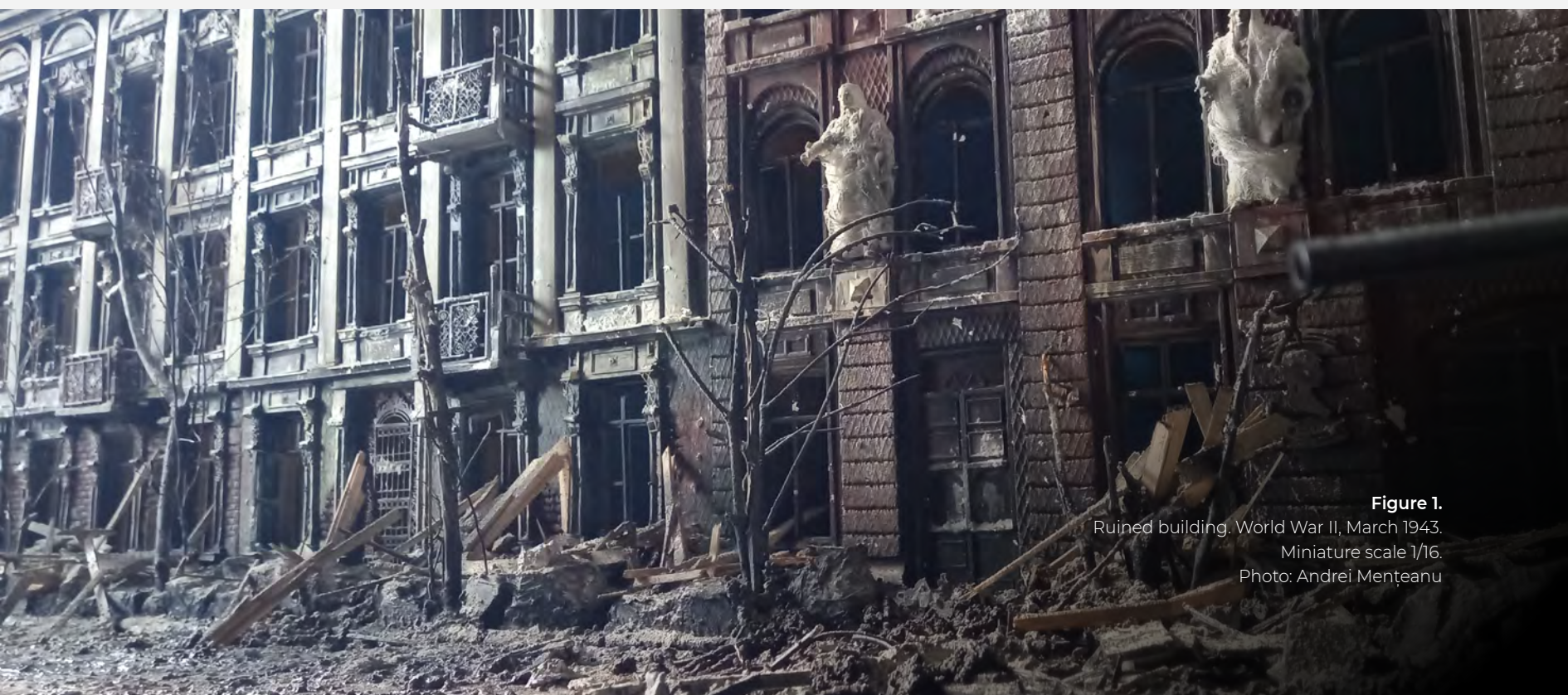


Figure 1.
Ruined building. World War II, March 1943.
Miniature scale 1/16.
Photo: Andrei Mențeanu

Human memory is limited or often completely lost and the two-dimensional images of vintage photographs or documentary films in national archives are not sufficient, nor carefully researched by individuals, to ensure that the terrible acts of war are not repeated. The cruel and brutal images of battles, the destroyed historical architecture, the burned nature and above all, the millions of human lives lost, are aspects that have been preserved in photographs and documentary films but still cannot be sufficiently envisaged by modern citizens.

Partially erased or time-damaged photographs or the surreal movement of characters in old war films are not enough to convey the atmosphere of the period.

Moreover, the direct or indirect witnesses of those terrible and tragic moments in the lifespan of mankind are no longer with us and cannot tell us about the horrors they witnessed. Even cinematography reconstructions using the latest digital technology fail to achieve their original purpose, which is to sound a strong alarm about what the horror of war can mean.

However, photographic images can be used as valuable documentary material and can represent a precious research background for a model artist who builds dioramas with correctly scaled-down miniatures. The construction of historical miniatures requires a lot of time and attention to all the specific details, the aim of the model artist ultimately being to introduce the three-dimensional historical image of the conflagration into the viewer's mind.

The desire of the model artist is to reconstruct the past through a correct scientific realisation of the three-dimensional details that acts on the spectator's imagination and lets it come alive right in front of him. The scale model allows the viewer's imagination to expand and develop, facilitating his understanding of the representation of the past in a hyper-realistic manner.

The illustrations accompanying the text present a series of photographs of cinematic miniatures depicting historical re-enactments from the Second World War period.

The architecture of the urban landscape where the bloody battles took place was accurately respected for every street and building. The magic of the scale models is filtered through artistic compositions and cinematic frames, and the audience is invited into the small film set of history, where the miniatures can transport them in time and space through magical effects. An important catalyst, something that can trigger reactions in those around us that are in line with those of the model artist, is the concept of the miniature *trompe l'oeil*, a perspective effect that can be realised as a special effect in a cinema or museum space.



Figure 2. Ruined buildings. World War II, March 1943. Miniature scale 1/35. Photo: Andrei Mențeanu

Scenographic and technical means, such as light, smoke and seasonal effects, architectural elements, design of war machines, uniforms of combatants and design of street or interior ambience, all constitute important aspects in the construction of historical miniatures, which the model artist can also skillfully exploit. All of these are achieved through plastic and other material effects, providing real historical images that can remain firmly imprinted in the memory of the viewer. At the same time, and equally important, are the various materials from which these miniatures are made.

There are, no doubt, many museums, and memorials of the two world wars in which images are presented yearly, to develop the mental process of individual or collective memory.

However, the impression and reproduction of human sensations and feelings in the face of three-dimensional history made with the construction of miniatures, are considerably enhanced.



Figure 3. Ruined church and village. World War II, March 1943. The model is made of several types of building materials. Scale 1/35. Photo: Andrei Mențeanu



Figure 4. World War II, March 1943. Different types of materials can be seen in the ruined village. Scale 1/35. Photo: Andrei Mențeanu



Figure 5. A tank taken out of service in front of a complex building. World War II, March 1943. Miniature scale 1/35. Photo: Andrei Mențeanu



Figure 6.
A tank taken out of service.
World War II, March 1943.
Miniature scale 1/35.
Photo: Andrei Mențeanu



Figure 7. Ruined building. World War II, March 1943.
Miniature scale 1/16. Photo: Andrei Mențeanu



Figure 8. Ruined building, details. World War II, March 1943.
Miniature to scale 1/16. Photo: Andrei Mențeanu



Figure 9. Photographing miniatures using an artificial light. Miniature scale 1/35. Photo: Andrei Mențeanu



Figure 10. Photographing miniatures using natural daylight. Scale 1/35. Photo: Andrei Mențeanu



Figure 11. Photographing the miniatures, scale 1/35. Photo: Andrei Mențeanu

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